

# The Obviousness of Anarchy: Conclusion - The Art of Not Being Governed

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by John Hasnas, Associate Professor, Georgetown University, J.D., Ph.D, LL.M.

Continued from [The Obviousness of Anarchy: Public Goods](#)

Aristotle called man the rational animal, identifying human beings' ability to reason as their essential defining characteristic. I think this is a mistake. I think man is the imaginative animal. Human beings undoubtedly have the ability to reason, but they also have the ability to imagine that the world is different than it is, and the latter is a far more powerful force.

People root for the Chicago Cubs because they can imagine the Cubs winning the World Series, despite all evidence to the contrary. People regularly get married because they can imagine that they will change their obviously incompatible partner into the ideal husband or wife. People devote their time, effort, and money to political campaigns because they can imagine that if only Bill Clinton or Bob Dole or George W. Bush or John Kerry were elected, Washington, DC would be transformed into Camelot. And more significantly, people volunteer to fight wars because they can imagine themselves running through a field of machine gun fire unscathed. Only the ability to imagine an afterlife for which they have absolutely no evidence can explain why human beings would strap explosives to themselves and blow themselves up in an effort to kill as many innocent people as possible.



*rules not rulers*

Do you ever wonder why people believed in the divine right of kings, despite the fact that the monarchs of their time were patently not the type of individuals an all-knowing, all-good god would choose to reign over them? They believed in it because they were taught to believe in it and because they could imagine that it was so, regardless of all evidence to the contrary. We no longer believe in such silly things as the divine right of kings. We believe that government is necessary for an orderly peaceful society and that it can be made to function according to the rule of law. We believe this

because we have been taught to believe it from infancy and because we can imagine that it is so, regardless of all contrary evidence.

One should never underestimate the power of abstract concepts to shape how human beings see the world. Once one accepts the idea that government is necessary for peace and order and that it can function objectively, one's imagination will allow one to see the hand of government wherever there is law, police, and courts and render the non-political provision of these services invisible. But if you lay aside this conceptual framework long enough to ask where these services originated and where, to a large extent, they still come from, the world assumes a different aspect. If you want the strongest argument for anarchy, simply remove your self-imposed blinders and look around.

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1. With all due respect, I'm very skeptical about this.

Sure, governments are doing a lousy job, but it would be a grave error to believe that simply removing them would lead to paradise.

See, the human animal tends to form groups – be it clans, gangs, cults or governments. Be it companies, sports teams or internet communities.

The moment you dissolve one such group, a vacuum is created, and soon enough another one takes its place. This is an emergent behavior we all engage in without knowing it. It all happens without conscious intention on part of any individual.

Without a ‘justice system’ there would be ku klux klans and all sorts of vigilantism. The human mind is not as innocent as we’d love to believe.

Unfortunately, somebody has to protect us from ourselves. However much we’d love to believe otherwise.

There’s hope though: We could educate ourselves about how our minds work – and correct for the systemic error. Without such education, anarchy would lead to disaster.

Unfortunately.

1. I understand your point that many people want to form groups. But it’s a mistake to think all people want to be a member of a group, e.g. “Redskins fan” or “Democrat” or whatever. And depending on the time of day, we are fiercely individualistic or we are collectivist. But we do it all for our own self interest – selfish reason.

A few weeks back the series discussed the justice system in Ancient Ireland – they had arbitration without government for hundreds of years. And today’s codified laws are based on common law, which originated outside the State as well.

“Someone needs to protect us from ourselves.” – I don’t even want to address this. It’s too ridiculous.

The real deal is that we practice anarchy most of the day. We associate voluntarily. You do that too, unless you are being tortured right now in a gulag. Anarchy is right before your very eyes.

We are an imaginary animal for sure. Because we can imagine away the reality that we, as a species, could never have advanced without predominately voluntarily associating, i.e. anarchy. The 1% of the time that people do not voluntarily associate is when they are participating in the political process and voting for new masters over everyone, including those who do not want rulers.

## Reply

1. it’s a mistake to think all people want to be a member of a group, e.g. “Redskins fan” or “Democrat” or whatever. And depending on the time of day, we are fiercely individualistic or we are collectivist. But we do it all for our own self interest – selfish reason.

My point is precisely that we end up in groups without a conscious intention. It’s a subconscious need. Our whims only seem random, they end up pushing up in a certain direction – whether we want to acknowledge it or not.

A few weeks back the series discussed the justice system in Ancient Ireland –

they had arbitration without government for hundreds of years.

You could post a link here.

Without having read it, I'll venture a guess: When they deemed it important, people gathered together and decided the fate of certain individuals. An important but not officially or consciously acknowledged factor in the decisions was the popularity of those individuals – some got worse treatment than others.

“Someone needs to protect us from ourselves.” – I don't even want to address this. It's too ridiculous.

There has to be a way to protect the unpopular from the majority.

A government is surely a lousy attempt at that, but there has to be some system in place. I don't know what. Leaving things to the crowd can have horrible consequences for the people the crowd doesn't care about.

[Reply](#)

1. Crowd better be ready for some lead if one is so unpopular. I swear it was in self-defense.

[Reply](#)

2. I'm working on a step-by-step guide on what to replace our government with. It's not finished though.

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